Climate plans not enough to meet target; Report says Canada set to overshoot emissions goal for 2020 by 20%

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Byline: Alex Ballingall Toronto Star

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Body

The Liberal government's signature climate change plan - which imposes carbon pricing across the country and has been used to justify the approval of the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion - isn't enough to ensure Canada meets its emissions target under the Paris Agreement, according to a new report tabled Tuesday in the House of Commons.

The report, a first-of-its-kind collaboration between the auditors general of nine provinces and the federal environment commissioner, highlights "common shortcomings" in how different levels of government are combating greenhouse gas emissions and preparing for the effects of climate change. The authors conclude that Canada is on pace to overshoot its emissions target for 2020 by nearly 20 per cent and that more action is needed to meet the Paris Agreement target by 2030.

"Meeting Canada's 2030 target will require substantial effort and actions beyond those currently planned or in place," the report says. "It is unclear how Canada will meet this target."

Environment Minister Catherine McKenna welcomed the report, and told reporters that the government remains "100-per-cent committed" to attaining the Paris Agreement target of reducing emissions to 30 per cent lower than their 2005 level by 2030.

"We have been firm as a government. We're not stepping back on climate action and I'm going to continue working here with Canadians who expect serious climate action," McKenna said.

Opposition MPs, however, said the report shows the government is failing to meaningfully address one of the biggest public policy issues of the 21st century. New Democrat MP Alexandre Boulerice said it further erodes his confidence in the government's climate change plan, which his party has long criticized for sticking with the reduction targets of the Conservative government under Stephen Harper.

Boulerice pointed out that previous reports have indicated the government is on track to fall short of that target, including a recent submission to the United Nations that predicted Canada - even if it fulfils all the measures of the framework - would still need to cut 66 megatonnes of emissions to meet its Paris Agreement commitment by 2030.

Green party Leader Elizabeth May said in a statement that the report shows the "wholly unacceptable" state of climate change action. "I hope this report serves as a wake-up call for all levels of government in this country," she said.

In December 2016, the Liberal government announced a "Pan-Canadian Framework" on climate change, which includes investments in clean technology, new regulations on methane emissions, the phase-out of coal-fired energy and a plan to impose a minimum price on carbon that kicks in next year. As the centrepiece of the government's climate change plan, the framework is often cited by McKenna, Trudeau and others when asked about the government's decision to approve the $7.4-billion Trans Mountain pipeline expansion, which would triple the capacity to transport oilsands bitumen from Alberta to the coast of British Columbia.

Provincial buy-in to the plan has never been universal, with Saskatchewan's government firmly opposed to any carbon pricing imposed by Ottawa. While Ontario and Alberta - the country's largest greenhouse gas emitters - have signed on, elections in those provinces could see Conservative politicians who are staunch opponents take power.

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